



**Testimony of Helen Benjamin, AARP Volunteer
Before the Joint Committee on Aging in Support of
S.B. 142, AA increasing Eligibility for the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elderly and
S.B. 143, AA Increasing Eligibility and Funding for the Alzheimer Respite Care Program
February 28, 2012**

Good morning Chairwoman Prague, Chairman Serra, Ranking Members Kelly & Frey, and members of the Aging Committee. My name is Helen Benjamin, and I am an AARP volunteer from Stratford, CT. AARP is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization with nearly 600,000 Connecticut members. We advocate for long-term services and supports that give consumers the option to live in the most appropriate, least restrictive setting. Today, we are pleased to support the concepts outlined in S.B. 142 and S.B.143.

AARP supports expanding eligibility for the Alzheimer's Respite Care program & the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders, provided this does not negatively impact the ability of current enrollees to get services or supports.

S.B.143 would expand eligibility for the Alzheimer's Respite Care program by increasing the income level to \$50,000 annually, allowing more individuals to qualify. The program is vital to supporting unpaid family caregivers that are the backbone of our long-term care system. In Connecticut, an estimated 711,000 family caregivers provided 465 million hours of care to an adult with limitation in daily activities during 2009. The estimated economic value of this unpaid contribution was approximately \$5.8 billion. Respite services available under the Alzheimer's Respite Care program provide the temporary reprieve caregivers need to reduce stress and stay healthy enough to provide care for a loved one.

AARP also supports the concept in S.B. 142 to expand eligibility for the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders by raising the asset limits.¹ The Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders provides a broad array of home health and social services to individuals age 65 and older at risk of institutionalization or at risk of having to move into an institution without home care services. Services available include: care management, adult day care, homemaker and companion services, home delivered meals, and personal care attendant. These services allow thousands of seniors to remain in their own homes at a fraction of the cost of nursing home care.

An increase in the asset limit would allow additional seniors to qualify for home care services. Additionally, S.B. 142 allows seniors to keep more of their assets, which in turn, helps them pay for unexpected costs that arise when you live in the community. It is also worth noting that the state-funded Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders has an estate recovery requirement meaning that any surplus assets left behind when an individual passes away can be recouped to reimburse the state for services or support paid on the individual's behalf.

¹ Effective January 1, 2012 the asset limits for Level 1 and Level 2 of the state-funded CT Home Care Program for Elders is \$34,092 (individual) and \$45,456 (couple).

AARP believes the proposals to expand eligibility in S.B. 142 and S.B. 143 are necessary steps toward expanding access and choice. But, additional funding is also needed. While AARP supports increasing the eligibility, we do not believe that it should be at the expense of capping these programs or creating waitlists. We urge you to provide adequate funding to ensure newly eligible individuals can actually access services. This is particularly important for the Alzheimer's Respite Care program, which faces a 10% funding cut in the Governor's budget proposal.

Long-term care rebalancing is about personal dignity and choice; it is also fiscally expedient. AARP believes that expanding and properly funding the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders and Alzheimer's Respite Care program would respect consumer preferences and provide cost-effective alternatives to nursing home care. We urge this Committee to increase eligibility and recommend adequate funding to expand services to new participants. Thank you.